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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, SOPN, PQ
SUBJECT: EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENTS IN CANAL ZONE

REF: PANAMA 1246

SUMMARY: RADICAL ANTI-TREATY SPIRIT AMONG CANAL ZONE LABOR FORCE APPEARS TO BE DWINDLING SOMEWHAT, WITH SOME DIVISIONS EVEN AMONG POLITICIZED OPPOSITION. EMPLOYEE INTEREST IN IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION REGARDING PAY, BENEFITS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH; AT LEAST TWO PETITIONS ON THIS SCORE WILL BE CIRCULATING IN WASHINGTON SHORTLY. ONE EMPLOYEE GROUP CALLED FOR A 24-HOUR JOB ACTION ON FRIDAY, MARCH 10, BUT THIS APPEARS TO HAVE ATTRACTED RELATIVELY LITTLE NOTICE.
END SUMMARY.

1. SINCE FEBRUARY 22 "TRUTH SQUAD" RALLY AND HIGH SCHOOL DEMONSTRATIONS (REFTEL), HIGHLY-POLITICIZED ANTI-TREATY SPIRIT HAS APPARENTLY DWINDLED SOMEWHAT AMONG CANAL ZONE LABOR FORCE. ON MARCH 1, WILLIAM DRUMMOND CIRCULATED
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AN "OPEN LETTER TO THE CANAL ZONE" WHICH SOUGHT TO WHIP UP EMPLOYEE SENTIMENT BY ATTRIBUTING REMARKS INSULTING TO WORK FORCE TO AN ALLEGED "INTERCEPTED" PHONE CALL BY EMBASSY LABOR OFFICER (COPY POUCHED ARA/PAN). MAIN COMMENT WE HAVE HEARD SO FAR IS THAT MOST PEOPLE SEE IT AS A SIGN THAT DRUMMOND IS GETTING DESPERATE.

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2. AN EVENING RALLY MARCH 6 AT COCO SOLO HIGH SCHOOL DREW ABOUT 150-175 PEOPLE; REPORTS INDICATE THAT MANY WERE SECONDARY STUDENTS, NOT EMPLOYEES. MEETING WAS CALLED TO "ANALYZE" A PIECE OF "DRAFT LEGISLATION" PRODUCED BY A NEW GROUP CALLING ITSELF "CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR ACTION". THE "LEGISLATION" INCLUDED SUCH ITEMS AS DEMAND FOR MILITARY POLICE PATROLS IN CANAL COMMISSION HOUSING AREAS, AND RETIREMENT AT 25 PERCENT OF BASE PAY AFTER FIVE YEARS (COPY BEING POUCH ARA/PAN). IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT TWO WELL-KNOWN TREATY OPPONENTS, WOULD CARRY THIS TO WASHINGTON AND WOULD MEET WITH SENATOR LAXALT AND OTHERS; WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO VERIFY WHETHER THEY HAVE ACTUALLY GONE. HOWEVER, THERE WAS REPORTEDLY CONSIDERABLE DISSENSION EVEN AMONG THOSE PRESENT, WITH SOME ARGUING THAT DEMANDS WERE SO EXCESSIVE AS TO DISCREDIT LEGITIMATE WORKFORCE INTERESTS.

3. FLYSHEETS ANNOUNCING THIS RALLY INCLUDED A CALL FOR A 24-HOUR "JOB ACTION" STARTING FRIDAY MORNING, MARCH 10. IN ITS LETTER AUTHORIZING USE OF AUDITORIUM, PANCANAL POINTED OUT THAT CALLING FOR STRIKE OR SIMILAR ACTION AGAINST FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS A FELONY. THIS WAS READ TO AUDIENCE EARLY IN MEETING; ONLY SPEAKER WHO MENTIONED THIS CALL SIMPLY TOLD AUDIENCE "IT'S UP TO YOU". THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE MUCH TALK OF SUCH ACTION, AND PANCANAL DOES NOT EXPECT MAJOR PROBLEM.
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4. ALSO ON MONDAY, CAPT. JOHN FARMER WAS ELECTED TO SUCCEED CAPT. JOHN WILLIAMS AS PRESIDENT OF KEY PANAMA CANAL PILOTS' ASSOCIATION, BEATING TWO AVOWED ANTI-TREATY ACTIVISTS INCLUDING CAPT. LEONARD BELL, A FREQUENT SPEAKER AT RALLIES HERE. FARMER IS A LONG-TIME UNION OFFICIAL, HAS HELD PRESIDENCY BEFORE, AND INTENDS TO CONTINUE ALONG LINES SET BY WILLIAMS, ESCHEWING POLITICS WHILE STRIKING HARD FOR WORKFORCE BENEFITS.

5. WORKING DRAFT OF IMPLEMENTING BILL WAS DISTRIBUTED TO LABOR UNION AND CIVIC COUNCIL PRESIDENTS BY PANCANAL ON MARCH 7. REACTION TO THIS IS STILL FORMING, BUT PANAMA "STAR AND HERALD" FOR MARCH 9 PRINTED TEXT OF A PETITION TO BE CIRCULATED BY JAMES O'DONNELL. PRESIDENT OF LOCAL 14 AFGE (COPY POUCHED ARA/PAN). THIS PETITION EXPLICITLY DISAVOWS ANY INDICATION OF PRO- OR ANTI-TREATY VIEWS BY SIGNERS, BUT STRONGLY ATTACKS ADEQUACY OF EMPLOYEE PROVISIONS OF DRAFT BILL. SALIENT POINTS INCLUDE:

A. ATTACK ON RETIREMENT PROPOSAL, AND CALL FOR

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MILITARY-STYLE 20-YEAR, NO-AGE-LIMIT RETIREMENT AS
ALTERNATIVE FOR VOLUNTARY SEPARATION.

B. DEMAND FOR RIGHT OF U.S. EMPLOYEES TO PURCHASE
QUARTERS, OR FOR RENT- AND UTILITIES-FREE QUARTERS
FOR DURATION OR EMPLOYMENT.

C. DEMAND THAT DOD PRIORITY PLACEMENT PROGRAM BE
AVAILABLE FOR ALL EMPLOYEES IN LIEU NARROWER CSC
SYSTEM.

ARTICLE SAYS THIS PETITION WILL CIRCULATE TO ALL EMPLOYEES
IN NEXT FEW DAYS AND WILL THEN BE TRANSMITTED TO
CONGRESS.
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7. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT APPARENT DROP IN POLITICIZED
ANTI-TREATY OPPOSITION IN CANAL ZONE SHOULD NOT
BE MISREAD AS INDICATING THAT WE ARE OUT OF THE
WOODS ON LABOR FRONT THERE. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHAT
WORKFORCE AS A WHOLE THINKS OF PACKAGE AVAILABLE TO IT
IN DRAFT LEGISLATION. BUT UNIONS WILL CLEARLY BE GOING
FOR MORE; IF AVERAGE WORKER AGREES THAT BENEFITS
PROPOSED ARE INADEQUATE, THERE COULD STILL BE SOME
ROCKS AHEAD.
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